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C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 000582

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CCA JARAHN HILLSMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/17/2019

TAGS: [ETRD](#) [ETTC](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CU](#) [PO](#)

SUBJECT: (C) CUBA: REVIEW FOR SUSPENSION OF TITLE III OF THE LIBERTAD ACT

REF: A. STATE 115416

[B.](#) 08 LISBON 2753

Classified By: Pol/Econoff Lucy Chang for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[¶1.](#) (C) In response to Ref A, Pol/Econoff met November 17 with Joao Batista, senior MFA official responsible for Cuban affairs, to discuss Portuguese-Cuban relations. Portugal's relationship with Cuba has not significantly changed since Ref B update in December 2008. Batista noted that while Portugal does not have strong commercial or cultural ties to Cuba, it favors continued dialogue with Cuba. Portugal believes that dialogue with Cuba must be maintained to advance political transition.

[¶2.](#) (C) Political Engagement: Portugal supports the advancement of democracy and human rights in Cuba. While it has not made public statements or undertaken other governmental actions specifically condemning human rights abuses in Cuba or supporting Cuban civil society, Portugal has participated in EU decision-making regarding Cuba and has joined the EU consensus on supporting human rights and democratic transition. In June 2009, Joao Cravinho, Portuguese Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, visited Cuba at the invitation of the Cuban government to discuss the bilateral relationship. Portugal has not received any high-level diplomatic visit by a Cuban official since the March 2007 visit of former Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque during Portugal's EU presidency.

[¶3.](#) (C) Commercial Engagement and Cooperative Agreements: Portuguese businesses have limited investments in Cuba; there is some Portuguese interest in Cuba's tourism sector, and there are small Portuguese companies that export food and pharmaceuticals to Cuba. (These companies are currently facing difficulties due to Cuba's shortage of hard currency.)

Over the past year, the GOP has not initiated or agreed to any new bilateral trade agreement or other cooperative agreement with Cuba. Portugal and Cuba have the following ongoing agreements: a general commercial agreement (1977), a cooperative agreement on the prevention of inappropriate use and repression of illicit trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances (1999), an agreement on the reciprocal protection and promotion of investments (1999), a convention to avoid double taxation and prevent fiscal evasion (signed in 2000, entered into force in 2005), and a protocol of cooperation in the area of sports (2007).

[¶4.](#) (C) Educational/Cultural/Professional Exchanges: In August 2009, under a cooperative agreement signed in June 2009 by the Cuban and Portuguese Health Ministries, 44 Cuban doctors began working in Portugal under three-year contracts (reporting septel). The doctors were recruited as a temporary solution to Portugal's shortage of family

practitioners, especially in rural areas. Under the terms of the agreement, Portuguese municipalities are providing the doctors with housing and monthly utilities, while Portuguese Regional Health Authorities are paying their salaries. An independent Portuguese doctors union and two medical students associations have questioned the qualifications of the Cuban-trained doctors; however, the doctors have been well received in the three municipalities where they have been placed. In addition, the two countries signed a cooperative agreement in 2000 that provides for cultural exchanges in sports, press, cinema, and other areas. While still in effect, that agreement has been inactive in recent years.

Batista was not aware of any other educational or professional exchange programs or agreements with Cuba, but noted that some municipalities have covered travel expenses and medical costs for certain Portuguese citizens to travel to Cuba for eye surgery. Batista added that the Portuguese and Cuban Olympic Committees have protocols of cooperation and that the governments are developing protocols in the areas of environment, science, and technology.

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